

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1334

INFO AMEMBASSY ATHENS

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

UNCLAS BEIRUT 6612

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: CFED

SUBJECT: FEDERAL BENEFITS CHECKS

REF: STATE 181625 & 176947, BEIRUT 6315

1. EMBASSY BEIRUT RECOMMENDS THAT TREASURY CHECKS CONTINUE TO BE SENT BEIRUT FOR DELIVERY OR PICK-UP. 1918 CHECKS REMAIN IN FILES, SIXTY PER CENT REMAIN FOR JUNE, FIFTY PER CENT FOR MAY, AND THIRTY PER CENT FOR APRIL. THIS IS NOT INDICATIVE OF THE NUMBER OF PERSONS WHO UP TO THIS TIME HAVE CHOSEN NOT TO COLLECT THEIR CHECKS AS MANY FAMILIES RECEIVE MORE THAN ONE CHECK EACH MONTH. LOCAL MAIL SERVICE STOPPED IN SEPTEMBER, CONSEQUENTLY MANY PERSONS HAVE NINE MONTHS OF CHECKS IN FILES. THESE CHECKS ARE STILL BEING COLLECTED. RECENTLY 37 CHECKS COLLECTED BY ONE FAMILY. UNKNOWN QUANTITY AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER CHECKS ARE HELD IN LOCAL POSTAL SYSTEM.

2. INTERNAL SECURITY SITUATION FOR MANY PERSONS IS NOT DETERIORATING AND THEY ARE ABLE TO AWAIT A FAVORABLE MOMENT TO TRAVEL. RISKS VARY FROM TIME TO TIME AND BY AREA. WHEN ROUTE TO BEIRUT BECOMES LESS HAZARDOUS BENEFICIARIES CONSIDER THAT RISK HAS LOWERED, THAT THEY ARE SHORT OF CASH OR IN DEBT AND UNCLASSIFIED

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DECIDE THAT RISK AND COST OF TRIP ARE BALANCED BY

THEIR NEED. MANY CHECKS ARE FOR RELATIVELY SMALL AMOUNT AND ARE NOT WORTH COLLECTING EACH MONTH. IN SOME CASES COST OF JOURNEY BY TAXI OR FUEL FOR PRIVATE CAR CAUSES POSTPONEMENT. BENEFICIARIES ARE EXTENDED CREDIT IN THE MEANTIME BECAUSE THEY ARE KNOWN TO RECEIVE U.S. GOVERNMENT PENSIONS.

3. SOME HAVE REQUESTED THAT CHECKS BE SENT TO DAMASCUS, ATHENS, NICOSIA, LONDON, AND EVEN TO TEL AVIV ON A ONE-TIME BASIS. HOWEVER, MOST RECIPIENTS ARE AGED AND A TRIP TO DAMASCUS, ALTHOUGH SOMETIME SAFER, IS USUALLY MORE ONEROUS THAN ONE TO BEIRUT. AT THE MOMENT, IN THE ABSENCE OF POUCH SERVICE, TRANSFER OF CHECKS INVOLVES CONSIDERABLE DELAY.

4. BENEFICIARIES DEPEND UPON CHECKS AS THEIR ONLY MEANS OF MONETARY SUPPORT. EMBASSY DOES NOT SEE ANY PARTICULAR DANGER TO CHECKS HELD IN CONSULAR SECTION WHICH WOULD OFFSET NEEDS OF BENEFICIARIES. THEY ARE GENERALL WELL-INTEGRATED INTO THEIR LOCAL COMMUNITY AND HAVE NO INTENTION OF LEAVING RELATIVES AND HOMES TO RETURN TO UNITED STATES WHERE THEY HAVE ONLY TENUOUS CONNECTIONS. FURTHER, COST OF LIVING IS TOO HIGH TO ENABLE THEM TO SURVIVE IN U.S. ON PENSIONS. IT IS GRANTED THAT WELFARE AND SUPPLEMENTAL BENEFITS ARE GENERALLY AVAILABLE TO THEM IN THE UNITED STATES, BUT THEY ARE NOT AWARE OF HOW SUCH BENEFITS APPLY TO THEM AND ARE UNWILLING TO TRUST THEIR FUTURE TO RUMORS OR HALF-TRUTHS. THEY ALSO HAVE PREJUDICE AGAINST ACCEPTANCE OF WELFARE WHEN THEY CAN REMAIN INDEPENDENT AND EVEN RELATIVELY WELL-OFF IN THEIR OWN COMMUNITY.

5. EMBASSY THEREFORE STRONGLY URGES THAT CHECKS CONTINUE TO BE SENT FOR DISTRIBUTION. INDIVIDUALS WISHING TO PICK UP CHECKS AT DIFFERENT CONSULAR OFFICE FOR FORESEEABLE FUTURE CAN REQUEST TRANSFER OF CASE. EMBASSY PROPOSES TO CANCEL AND RETURN MISCELLANEOUS CHECKS ADVISING DEPARTMENT TELEGRAPHICALLY OF THOSE CANCELLED. THESE ARE LARGELY TAX REFUNDS. OTHER CHECKS WILL BE HELD FOR DISTRIBUTION UNTIL FURTHER ADVISED BY UNCLASSIFIED

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DEPARTMENT. AS AIRPORT IS NOT OPEN, CHECKS CANNOT BE RETURNED AT THIS TIME. FOR SAME REASON IT IS AT THIS MOMENT IMMATERIAL WHETHER ATHENS RETURNS JULY CHECKS AND WHETHER AUGUST CHECKS ARE ISSUED. HOWEVER, IN THE INTEREST OF PROVIDING MOST EXPEDITIOUS SERVICE TO FEDERAL BENEFICIARIES EMBASSY PROPOSES THAT WHEN JULY CHECKS HAVE BEEN RETURNED, THAT AMOUNT DUE TO EACH RECIPIENT FOR MONTHS OF JULY AND AUGUST BE COMBINED IN ONE CHECK WHICH

WOULD BE PRINTED AND READY FOR IMMEDIATE POUCHING TO
BEIRUT WHEN AIRPORT RE-OPENS AND POUCH SERVICE IS ONCE
AGAIN POSSIBLE. EMBASSY WOULD AT THAT TIME CANCEL
AND RETURN ALL PREVIOUS CHECKS. COMBINED JULY AND
AUGUST CHECKS WOULD BE LARGE ENOUGH TO ASSIST FAMILIES
IN FINANCIAL NEED AND DEPARTMENT REQUIREMENT FOR RETURN
OF CHECKS UNDELIVERABLE FOR MORE THAN THREE MONTHS
WOULD BE MET.
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